

*AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS*

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

1. (Currently Amended) A method of operating chromatography column apparatus; the apparatus comprising a column tube having first and second ends, and first and second discrete end cell structures which are associated with the respective ends of the column tube and positionable to close off the column tube and thereby define therein a column space for retaining chromatography medium, in use of the apparatus; at least the first end cell structure comprising a piston portion fitting slidably in the column tube;

the operating method comprising separating the second end of the column tube and the second end cell structure to provide an access spacing between them, moving a safety plate and blocking movement of the second end of the column tube toward the second end cell structure further maintain the access spacing, advancing the piston portion of the first end cell structure through the column tube to expose it at the open second end of the column tube, and carrying out maintenance of the piston portion thus exposed.

2. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1 in which the column tube is axially vertical with said first and second ends at the top and bottom respectively.

3. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, comprising using a powered drive, mounted on or adjacent the second end structure, to separate the column tube and the second end cell structure to provide said access spacing.

4. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, comprising using a powered drive to move said piston portion relatively forwardly through the column tube to be exposed at the second end thereof as aforesaid.

5. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 3, comprising operating the powered drive to separate the column tube and second end cell structure, and to move the piston portion through the column tube.

6. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 3, comprising hydraulically actuating the powered drive.

7. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 1, wherein the piston portion is supported from behind by an insertable support structure that reaches in from the first end of the column tube, with sufficient axial reach for the front of the piston portion to reach beyond the second end of the column tube for said maintenance.

8. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 7, comprising operating a powered drive and advancing the piston portion to said exposed position by means of a drive connection via said insertable support structure.

9. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 8 wherein the powered drive comprises plural hydraulically-actuated drive rods extending axially up the outside of the column tube, said drive rods being circumferentially spaced from one another, driven by cylinders mounted at or adjacent the second end cell structure, and connected to the insertable support structure by a radial connecting structure which crosses radially above the edge of the column tube at the first end thereof.

Claims 10 and 11 (Canceled).

12. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 7, wherein the insertable support structure has sufficient axial reach for the front of the piston portion to project beyond the second end of the column tube for said maintenance.

13. (Previously Presented) The method according to claim 9 wherein said drive rods are driven by cylinders mounted below the second end cell structure.

14. (New) The method according to claim 1 wherein separating the second end of the column tube and the second end cell structure to provide an access spacing between them

includes moving guide rods having projecting stops limiting the height to which the second end of the column tube can be separated from the second end cell structure.